

**Required Readings (Excerpted from Tibetan sources)
for Geshe Thupten Palsang's
Fall 2015 Course on Emptiness
at (Dip) Tse Chok Ling Monastery.**

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Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (lam rim chen mo)* - Excerpt

Seek certainty in the following manner: As explained before, form a clear mental image of the object to be refuted by reasoning. [For that] you should contemplate well and identify the intrinsically existing [person] superimposed by the ignorance in your mental continuum.

Then focus on how, if there were such an intrinsically existing [person], it could only be one with or different [from its aggregates], and how there would be logical inconsistencies in both of those positions. Develop certainty about these inconsistencies. Finally, consolidate your certainty that the person does not exist intrinsically to the slightest degree. Practise this aspect of emptiness often.

Then bring to mind the [conventional] person who undeniably appears. Turn your mind to dependent-arising, wherein [that person] is posited as the accumulator of karma and the experiencer of effects, and find certainty as to how dependent-arising is tenable without intrinsic existence. When [the lack of intrinsic existence and dependent-arising] seem contradictory, think about how they are not contradictory, taking an example such as the reflection [of a face in a mirror].

A reflection of a face is undeniably a common locus of (1) being empty of the eyes, ears, and such that appear [in the mirror] and (2) being generated in dependence upon a mirror and a face, while disintegrating when any of these conditions are lacking.

Likewise, you should train yourself to think that it is not contradictory that the person has not even a particle of intrinsic nature, yet is the accumulator of karma and the experiencer of effects, and has been generated in dependence on earlier karma and afflictions. Understand that it is like this in all [other] cases.

Lama Tsongkhapa's *Illumination of the Thought* (dbu ma dgongs pa rab gsal) - Excerpt

HOW PHENOMENA ARE POSITED THROUGH THE POWER OF CONCEPTUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

The *Questions of Upali* [Sutra] states:

*Blossomed flowers pleasing myriad minds;
Eminent golden mansions resplendent and attractive —
Here, with regard to those, no-one created them;
They are posited through the power of conceptual consciousness;
Through the power of conceptual consciousness the world is imputed*

It is taught that phenomena are posited through the power of conceptual consciousnesses. There are many other [texts] that describe phenomena as merely imputed by conceptual consciousness and as posited through the power of conceptual consciousness.

[Nagarjuna's] *Sixty Verses of Reasoning* also says:

*That the world is conditioned by ignorance,
Was taught by the perfect Buddha.
So why would it not be feasible for this world
To be [a product of] conceptual consciousness?*

In [Chandrakirti's] commentary [on the *Sixty Verses of Reasoning*] the meaning of this [verse] is explained in terms of the world being merely imputed by conceptual consciousness without existing by way of its own nature.

[Aryadeva's] *Four Hundred Stanzas* states:

*Without conceptual consciousness,
Desire and so forth have no existence,
What intelligent person would grasp at
"The real object and conceptual consciousness"?*

In [Chandrakirti's] commentary [on the *Four Hundred Stanzas*] it also says:

Only based on the existence of conceptual consciousness do they exist and without conceptual consciousness their existence does not come to be. Without doubt, they are like a snake imputed upon a coiled rope — definitely without being established by way of their own nature.

"Real object" refers to existence by way of its own nature, while "conceptual consciousness" is generated in dependence on that.

In the commentary, the explanation of desire being like a snake that is imputed on a rope is only an illustration. It indicates that all other phenomena are also posited by conceptual consciousness, like a snake that is imputed on a rope.

With respect to a rope that is similar to a snake owing to its multi-colored pattern and the way it is coiled, when it appears in a place that is not well-lit, the thought, "this is a snake" may arise. At that time, from the side of the rope, whether in terms of the collection [of the parts]

of the snake or its [individual] parts, there is not the slightest instance of a snake. Thus, the [rope-] snake is merely labelled by a conceptual consciousness.

Similarly, when in dependence on the aggregates the thought “I” arises, on the part of the aggregates — whether in terms of a collection of earlier and later continuums or in terms of simultaneous continuums or in terms of their parts — there is nothing that can be posited as an instance of that [“I”]. This will be explained in detail below.

Because of that [reason] and also because there is nothing in the slightest which is of a different nature from the parts or part-possessors of the aggregates that can be apprehended as its basis, the “I” is merely posited by a conceptual consciousness in dependence on the aggregates, without existing by way of its own nature.

This has also been taught in [Nagarjuna’s] **Precious Garland**:

*The individual is not earth, not water,
Not fire, not wind, not space,
Not consciousness, and if he is not all of them,
What individual is there other than them?*

Here, “individual” refers to the person, the sentient being, the “I” or the self. [The words] “not earth” until “not consciousness” refute that the person is posited as being the six elements of the sentient being, which are his parts, while [the words] “not all of them” refute that the person is posited as being the collection of the constituents. The last line [of the verse] refutes that the person is posited as being of a different nature than the constituents. Nonetheless, this does not mean that one does not accept [the existence of] the person, nor that one accepts that the “mind-basis of all” and so forth is the person.

Therefore, just as it has been elucidated by the author of our commentary [Chandrakirti], Arya [Nagarjuna] also accepts that.

If one understands the way in which the person is posited by conceptual consciousness, [one will understand] that all other phenomena are posited by conceptual consciousness in the same way.

From the **King of Meditative Stabilization [Sutra]**:

*Just as you perceive the notion of the self,
So should you mentally apply this to all.*

The **Arya Condensed [Perfection of Wisdom Sutra]** also states:

*Just as the self, understand all sentient beings;
Just as all sentient beings, understand all phenomena.*

[Nagarjuna’s] **Precious Garland** also says clearly:

*Since an individual is a composite of the six constituents,
He is not real, and likewise
Since each of the constituents is also
A composite, they are not real.*

The meaning of the first line is to state [the reason], “since the individual is imputed in dependence on the composite of the six constituents”. The meaning of the third and fourth lines is that because it is impossible [for something] not to have parts and part-possessors, each of the constituents is also imputed in dependence upon the composite of its many parts.

Therefore, [the person and the six constituents] are not real, that is, they do not exist by way of their own nature.

Furthermore, if something is imputed in dependence on the composite of its parts, the parts and the part-possessor cannot be posited as the thing itself. Yet it is also impossible for something that is of a different entity from these to be that thing.

Even though only the manner in which a vase, etc., is posited by conceptual consciousness is similar to [the manner in which] a snake is imputed on a rope, the vase and the rope-snake are completely different in terms of whether they exist or not and whether or not they are able to perform the function [of a vase or a snake].

This is because these two differ in many ways, such as with regard to whether their verbal conventions (*e.g.*, the verbal convention of a vase is “vase”) must be used or not and whether those conventions are susceptible to invalidation [by valid cognition], and so forth.

Regarding the tenability of actions [in a world of] imputation by conceptual consciousness: among the commentators of the words and meaning [of the scriptures], the system of elucidating [the works of] Arya Nagarjuna and his son [Aryadeva] by the three — Buddhapalita, Shantideva, and this master [Chandrakirti] — is unique.

That (*i.e.*, tenability of actions) is in fact also the most difficult [issue] of the Madhyamika view.

[Nagarjuna’s] **Precious Garland** says:

*Since physical things are mere names,
Space too is merely name;
How can there be form with no elements?
Therefore, mere name does not exist either.*

*Feeling, discrimination, volition, and
Consciousness are to be contemplated
Just like the elements and the self;
Therefore the six constituents are selfless.*

And:

*Apart from imputed conventions
What world is there, in fact,
To exist or not?*

Ultimately even mere names do not exist. Nothing whatsoever exists except for that which is conventionally posited through the power of names or verbal conventions; just as this is stated [in the **Precious Garland**], [phenomena] exist as merely nominal imputations.

If this is well understood, one will understand the following well: (a) all phenomena need to be posited dependently, (b) on account of being dependently imputed and having been generated in dependence, [phenomena] have no existence by way of their own nature, (c) they do not possess an independent nature, something that is not posited through the power of verbal conventions that are other [than the phenomena themselves], and (d) no matter what phenomenon there is, it is posited without searching [for its inherent existence].

Lama Tsongkhapa's *Essence of Eloquent Speech* (drang nges legs bshad snying po) - Excerpt

One may [wrongly] assume that since a mundane person engages in a lot of analysis — “it is coming, it is not coming; it has been generated, it has not been generated”, and so forth — it is not proper to say [in response] to such inquiries, “it is coming!” or “it has been generated!”

However, this way of investigating and the above manner of analyzing (*i.e.*, engaging in ultimate analysis) are very different.

The [mundane person] does not inquire into coming and going by analyzing the objects that are imputed — imputed by the verbal conventions, “the one who is coming”, “the one who is going”, “coming”, and “going” — owing to dissatisfaction with [the fact that the objects] are merely imputed.

Instead, he engages in ordinary examination into the ordinary application of the verbal conventions for coming and going. Therefore, how can there be any contradiction when one asserts [that a mundane person engages in] examination?

Grasping at the existence of an essence that is established by way of its own characteristics after having analyzed the object of the verbal convention is not the grasping of an innate self-grasping [awareness].

Since sentient beings are bound in samsara by the innate [self-grasping], [it is] mainly the [innate self-grasping that] needs to be stopped in reliance on reasoning.

If one asks, how does [the innate self-grasping] grasp [at its object]? It grasps at internal and external phenomena as existing by way of their own nature without being merely posited through the power of verbal conventions.